

Temporal Conflict in the Reading Experience

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Abstract Analogous to our visual perspective, we also have a temporal perspective spanning beyond the present singular point in time. In literary narratives, the characters in the story have a visual perspective on the represented world whereas the reader has a temporal perspective on the narrative as such. The reader's temporal perspective is a bit eschewed to the represented visual perspective in that there is a temporal distance between the represented events and the reader's point of view. This temporal distance can be exploited aesthetically to create a conflict between the representation and the presentation of the literary work of art. In a vein similar to the 'conflict' in Husserlian picture consciousness, there is a temporal conflict in reading consciousness that will be discussed here with reference to literary examples from Flaubert and Kafka.

Keywords Phenomenology • Literature • Reader • Temporal perspective • Grammatical aspect

1 Introduction

What characterizes the reader's phenomenological experience of literary artworks? Edmund Husserl has intensively investigated the phenomenology of the different acts of perceiving, remembering, imagining, and picture-viewing. Acts of perception are presentational acts, acts of imagination and memory are representational acts, but acts of picture-viewing are a special combination of presentation and representation. The experience of pictures is characterized by an experience of a

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P.F. Bundgaard, F. Stjernfelt (eds.), *Investigations Into the Phenomenology and the Ontology of the Work of Art*, Contributions To Phenomenology 81, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-14090-2_4

conflict between presentation and representation, which makes the experience of even the most realistic picture (a *trompe l'oeil*) non-illusionistic.¹ But how, again, do we experience literary artworks? Is it like looking at pictures?

While Husserl himself has not conducted a thorough investigation of literary artworks,² his pupil Roman Ingarden certainly has (Ingarden 1931, 1968). In this article, I will focus on a hitherto neglected part of Ingarden's investigations, namely the relation between the literary artwork and the reader's temporal perspective,³ which, as I will try to show, has the ability to capture that experience of conflict in a representation.⁴ Pictures are present in our *visual perspective*, but the represented objects of literature can only be 'seen' with the mind's 'eye;' thus the reader's actual visual perspective is irrelevant when it comes to the represented objects of literature (unless we are dealing with concrete typographical poetry). I will argue that, instead, the reader's *temporal perspective* is relevant—because literary artworks are present to temporal perception. Thus, the relevant conflict to be analyzed in literary artworks is a temporal conflict (rather than a spatial conflict).

I will first discuss the presentation of literary artworks, where I will argue that there is a pure presentational layer that is temporal and available to temporal perception. For that reason, I will argue that, during reading, literary objects have a special affinity to remembered objects compared to imagined objects proper. The similarity between literary reading and remembering will be further explored in regard to the concept of temporal perspective. Both memory and literature can show us events from different temporal perspectives: the temporal distance to events varies—similarly to how the spatial distance to objects varies in visual perception. The hypothesis will be put forward that the temporal presentation of events in literature can create a temporal foreground-background structure to the reader. On the basis of Roman Ingarden's investigation of temporal perspective in reading, I will discuss literary examples of temporal conflict from Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Franz Kafka's unfinished tale *The Burrow*.

¹On conflict: *Widerstreit*, see Husserl on intentionality LU 1900–1901, and picture consciousness 1898–1925.

²Husserl does have some notes on the relation between fact and fiction somewhat mirroring the relation between presentation and representation. But more often than not, *fiction consciousness* is understood as illusion and seems to be the very antithesis of *picture consciousness* with its illusion-breaking 'conflict' (*Widerstreit*). But what interests me is the experience of the non-illusionistic elements, the conflicting intentions, in "representation" in general, especially in literary representation.

³See the chapters on temporal perspective in Ingarden 1972.

⁴As opposed to Ingarden's recap of the term *quasi* from Husserl, as in quasi-judgements in fiction for instance, which are somewhat illusion-preserving. On the other hand, the concept of *Widerstreit* seems to reemerge in Ingarden's ontological analysis as the existential moment of heteronomy, which applied to all man-made representations (see Ingarden 1931, but also Ingarden 1965). But what I am looking for here is something a little less general and more readily applicable to literary analysis.

2 Presentation of Literary Artworks and the Reader's Temporal Perspective

My initial question concerns the experience of *literary* works of art, and is, as such, more narrow than the question of the experience of represented objectivities in general. In what way does it matter which *type* of artwork a represented object is dependent on? Ingarden defines the literary artwork as opposed to other artworks *both* ontologically and epistemologically. Ontologically (Ingarden 1931), artworks (or representations) are stratified formations and the literary work of art is the most stratified with four different strata: word sounds, word meanings, schematized aspects, and represented objectivities. The presence of language elicits two strata by itself; visual artworks, for example, only have the strata of aspects and represented objects. When he investigates the *cognition* of the literary work of art, Ingarden (1968) addresses this entire stratified formation and not just the stratum of the represented objectivities. Secondly, since he investigates an *artwork*, he is mainly interested in the aesthetic reading (and, in relation to this, the possibilities for scientific readings of the work before and after the aesthetic reading, i.e., literary analyses). Aesthetic reading in general is a process with different phases,⁵ but the particularly literary experience is further characterized by three features (Ingarden 1968, §26; cf. Kietz 2013):

1. *Only the qualities appearing in the stratum of word sounds are accessible to the senses.*
2. *The whole work cannot be apprehended in a single moment, but only in temporal phases.*
3. *The experience is constituted on a purely intellectual understanding of the semantic units.*

I will concern myself primarily with the second element of the literary experience since it is in particular the relation between the non-actuality of the derived purely intentional object on the one hand, i.e., the non-temporality of the represented object, and the temporality of the process of reading on the other hand, which interests me.

First of all, Ingarden's description of the three elements of the literary experience corresponds very much to that of the Enlightenment philosopher G.E. Lessing's (cf. *Laokoon* 1766/1887), in that the temporal structure, and hence the temporal experience, is distinguished as elements in their own right. Lessing's thesis concerning the natural signification of literature was that the relation between word sounds and

⁵Cf. Ingarden 1968, §24.

semantic units should be mediated by the temporal structure, which would create structural iconicity between the stratum of word sounds and the semantic stratum.⁶

Scholars have mainly investigated the temporal presentation of literature in two ways:

1. From the perspective of the stratum of word sounds.
2. From the perspective of the semantic stratum.

The first perspective is generally applied in relation to poetry; the second perspective is generally applied to narratives. The first perspective is available to sense perception, but the second perspective is based on a purely intellectual understanding. Underscoring Lessing's thesis is the possibility for an *intuitive*, i.e., perceptual, apprehension of both poetry and narratives. Unless prosody is important to the narrative, perception seems to be reserved for poetry only. But (according to, e.g., the tradition of cognitive semiotics), semantics also rely on schematic structure. Schematic structures are formal structures and, as such, must be available to categorial perception. So, the word sounds are accessible to *sense perception*, i.e., material perception, and the semantic units, given that they rely on *schemas* are accessible to *categorial perception*, i.e., formal perception. But what about the second element, the *temporal* experience itself? Both the rhythm of the word sounds and the discourse (in which the events are presented) are dependent upon *temporal* structure, so how is temporal structure available to us? I will venture the hypothesis that the temporal phases and their relations are accessible to *temporal perception*. Temporal perception resides somewhere in-between sense perception and categorial perception in that time is neither purely material nor purely formal.

The question of different types of perception lies at the heart of Gestalt theory. In the founding essay by Christian von Ehrenfels (1890), it was the existence of temporal gestalts, like melodies, that initiated the theory. A melody is something more than the sum of its material parts; it can be transposed, for instance, to a different key while remaining the same as a melody. The theory of gestalts concerns our ability to perceive something independently of material and time—our ability to perceive forms, what Husserl calls categorial perception. But Husserl was not satisfied with the explanation of our experience of a melody through categorial perception alone. In his lectures on the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time (1893–1917), he argues that we must also be able to *perceive time* in itself, if we are to perceive a melody.

When a melody sounds, for example, the individual tone does not utterly disappear with the cessation of the stimulus or of the neural movement it excites. When the new tone is sounding, the preceding tone has not disappeared without leaving a trace. [...] If they [the tones of a melody] were to remain unmodified, then instead of a melody we would have a chord of simultaneous tones, or rather a disharmonious tangle of sound, as if we had struck simultaneously all the notes that had previously sounded. (Husserl 1905/1991, p. 11)

⁶In this sense, Lessing's thesis is the exact opposite of Roman Jakobson's 'poetic function,' where the iconicity is established by *disregarding* the temporal structure, i.e., projecting the principle of (spatial) equivalence from the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis. But my interest concerns *temporal* structure.

The individual tones of a melody do not disappear completely from consciousness after they have sounded; they remain present, albeit in a modified sense as *just-past*. According to Husserl, time consciousness is a tripartite structure composed of both the present moment (*impression*), a memory of the just-past moment (*retention*), and an anticipation of the immediate next moment (*protention*). If we are to perceive time as a *continuity*, and not just as discontinuous, punctual instances (pearls on a string), our experience of time must have a certain *extension* (similar to William James' idea of a specious present). Husserl says we have a temporal field in analogy to the visual field:

The original temporal field is limited, precisely as in perception's case. Indeed, on the whole, one might dare to assert that the temporal field always has the same extension. It moves, as it were, over the perceived and freshly remembered motion and its objective time in the same way as the visual field moves over objective space. (Ibid., p. 32)

The temporal field, or temporal perspective, moves over objective time like a visual perspective moves over objective space. Despite the fact that Ingarden saw the beginning of Husserl's turn to idealism exactly in his lectures on internal time—and, therefore, tried to explain temporal continuity as belonging to the mode of real being and not to the intentional mode of being (cf. Ingarden 1965)—he does retain the concept of temporal perspective. As Ingarden says in regard to the second element of the literary experience:

The second essential element of the literary aesthetic experiences which distinguishes them to a certain extent from the aesthetic experience of painting, sculpture and architecture is contained in the fact that a literary work of art can be apprehended only in an aesthetic experience occurring in several phases, in which all the successive parts of the work must be reconstructed one after the other, and the fact that there is no phase of this experience in which the whole work can be apprehended all at once in full actuality. And in every phase—except for the last—only a part of the work is cognized and made familiar and always only in a *temporal perspective* characteristic of this phase. (Ingarden 1968, p. 227, my italics)

Each phase of the experience of the literary work of art corresponds to a specific temporal perspective. In every present visual perception, the temporal perspective is always the same; but in memory, as we remember and re-present past events, our temporal perspective changes: we can, for example, recall an event in detail and thus have a more proximal temporal perspective on the event as opposed to when it is floating vaguely in the back of our memory, e.g., when we have trouble recalling something. Ingarden takes temporal perspective in memory as the basis for his investigation of temporal perspective in literature.

3 Temporal Perspective in Memory

Ingarden has formulated the question of our experience of literary artworks in the following way:

How can we be witnesses to the events portrayed in the work when, in dealing with a purely literary work, we do not actually perceive these objects and events in the strict sense of the word? (Ingarden 1968, p. 98)

And he continues:

In any case, it is impossible to be satisfied with the stereotyped view that the reader simply ‘imagines’ the objects when he reads. One would at least have to say that there is a particular way of ‘imagining’ that makes the ‘imagined’ object present to us. Husserl speaks of a ‘presentification’ [Vergegenwärtigung] that, though different from the ‘presentifying’ [Gegenwärtigung] that takes place during perception, is definitely related to it. (Ibid., pp. 98–99)

The ‘presence’ of the objects and events that are represented in a literary work of art must be understood in a *temporal* sense. One way of making things present in time that are no longer present in space is through memory.

According to Ingarden, there are two main ways of remembering past processes:

Either we apprehend a whole temporal interval and what happened in it from the standpoint of our actual present in a single act of remembering, all at once (for example as we call to mind in one act the long period of World War I) or else we transport ourselves in memory back to the beginning of the period in question and, in the process of remembering, progress as it were simultaneously with the remembered period by calling to mind the successive events and processes phase by phase. (Ibid., p. 110)

The two main ways of remembering results in two main types of temporal perspective:

Temporal Perspective

- Distal, i.e., disparateness with events
- Proximal, i.e., simultaneity with events

But, as Ingarden points out, since memory is a re-presentational act, a proximal perspective in memory is not the same as in a presentational act:

Absolute proximity is out of the question. If that were possible, what is simply remembered would be something perceived; but there is no genuine return to the past. (Ibid., p. 114)

In memory, only a quasi-presence is possible. A *distance* between the temporal point of view and the remembered event characterize temporal perspective in memory. I am not referring to the actual distance in objective time, but rather to the phenomenological distance in our memory—phenomenological in the sense that it is qualitative, not quantitative. For example, if there is some event we try to remember, it is not enough to be told the exact date of the event; we have to *localize* the event within our own experience; it must be *qualitatively* determined. The localization is crucial; the distance is greatest when the remembered event cannot be localized phenomenologically (ibid.), i.e., when the distance is unbounded. To remember is to localize events in our own phenomenological memory. When the event is localized, it is possible to diminish the distance even further by moving the temporal point of view back in time, as it were. The temporal point of view must also be localized: either we stay in our own present moment, and *time stands still* while we remember the past event—we disregard the fact that the remembered event is continuously sinking further and further into the past (ibid., p. 115): this is a static viewpoint. Or we transport ourselves back to the past events, our own present moment seems to disappear, and we move along with the past events (ibid.): this is a dynamic viewpoint.

So, temporal perspective in memory always entails a *distance*. The distance depends on the *localization* of both *event* and *viewpoint*.

Distance

- Localization of event
- Localization of point of view

The different possibilities can perhaps be illustrated thus:

1. *Localized perspective, non-localized event:*
[Point of view] Event
2. *Localized perspective, localized event:*
[Point of view] [Event]
3. *Non-localized (moving) perspective, localized event:*
 →Point of view [Event]
4. *Non-localized perspective, non-localized event:*
 →Point of view Event

The events are experienced differently according to the different temporal perspectives they are seen through, i.e., according to the *distance* and, hence, the different *localizations*. One possibility is, of course, that a given event is not remembered at all. This happens when the event is not yet localized (1). But there is also the possibility that what is remembered is a recurrent or habitual event, which is difficult to localize at a specific time since it has happened many times (1). Then there is the possibility of remembering an event all at once, so that there is no internal time sequence in the event. (2) And lastly, of course, there is the possibility of remembering an event in its temporal progression (3). I have included the possibility of neither point of view nor event being localized (4), which is not a real possibility in memory, but, as I will show later, this is a possibility in literature.

Event

- *Not localized*
 - None (no event remembered)
 - One-in-many (one event recurring many times)
- *Localized*
 - *Static*
 - Many-in-one (many events remembered as one)
 - One (punctual event)
 - *Dynamic*
 - One-by-one (an event remembered in its temporal succession)

The structure of a remembered event is dependent upon the temporal perspective and vice versa; they are mutually dependent. From the non-localized, non-remembered event down to the localized dynamic event, there is a change in

temporal perspective from distal toward proximal. Proximal perspective in memory is not real proximity where our real present coincides with the past present; hence, proximity can only come about if we *move* our point of view from the present back in the past. This means that distalness/proximity relies on a point of inversion between localization of event and localization of point of view; the most distal perspective entails non-localization of event (we cannot localize the event in our memory) and the most proximal perspective entails non-localization of point of view (i.e., moving our point of view away from our present temporal perspective).

Events can be remembered as independent wholes, either as several events summed up into one event or as one punctual event. In both these cases, they are remembered as bounded events. They can also be remembered by going through their dependent parts one-by-one, in which case they are remembered as unbounded. But there are two types of unboundedness. One is where the unboundedness is elicited by the non-localization of the point of view—when the point of view is immersed, so to say, in the ongoing temporal unfolding of the different parts of an event. The other type of unboundedness is elicited by the non-localization of the event—habitual events are generic and as such are not clearly bounded in relation to other events—they can vary. In other words, the boundedness of an event is dependent on the boundedness of the *distance* between point of view and event. Distance is dependent on localization of both point of view and event—so that it is bounded in both ends. If the distance becomes unbounded in either end, the event becomes unbounded. But the two types of unboundedness belong to the two different types of temporal perspective, distal and proximal, respectively.

While the reader's visual perspective might not be relevant to the experience of literary artworks, the reader's temporal perspective is. In literary works of art, there are also *temporal* aspects held-in-readiness and actualized by the reader during reading. This is what I will turn to now.

4 Temporal Perspective in Literature

The temporal perspective under discussion only appears in the *reading* of the literary work of art because the literary work of art in itself is non-temporal; the temporal perspectives must be actualized. The temporal perspective can never coincide with the represented events; absolute proximity is, like in the case of memory, out of the question—and even more so in regard to literature, where the relation between perspective and represented objectivities is not just a matter of temporal distance but a matter of a radical discontinuity between modes of being. But contrary to the spatial perspectives actualized, the temporal perspective coincides with the reader's own temporal perspective.

In the psychological research on spatial cognition, a distinction is made between an *allocentric* (distal) perspective and an *egocentric* (proximal) perspective (e.g., Linde and Labov 1975; Taylor and Tversky 1996). An allocentric perspective entails an object-to-object reference frame (e.g., North-south-East-west is defined in

relation to each other), whereas an egocentric perspective entails a subject-to-object reference frame (e.g., Right-Left defined in relation to me). Even if a literary work of art is written from the first-person perspective (or focalized from a represented egocentric perspective), the reader's *spatial* egocentric perspective never coincides with the represented egocentric perspective in the text—represented objects in a literary work of art are never to *my* right or to *my* left. But when a scene is presented from a *proximal temporal* perspective, i.e., when discourse time coincides with story time, the temporal *before* and *after* of the different parts of the represented event correspond to the temporal before and after of *my* reading. *This is because the time of reading is equivalent to the time of discourse.* The represented events belong to *story* time (representation) but the temporal perspective belongs to discourse time (presentation). A literary work of art is not temporal in itself (cf. Ingarden: it has the ontological moment of non-actuality, Ingarden 1965), the only temporality it has stems from the act of reading. As the narratologist Gerard Genette said

The temporality of written narrative is to some extent conditional or instrumental; produced in time, like everything else, written narrative exists in space and as space, and the time needed for 'consuming' it is the time needed for *crossing* or *traversing* it, like a road or a field. The narrative text, like every other text, has no other temporality than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading.

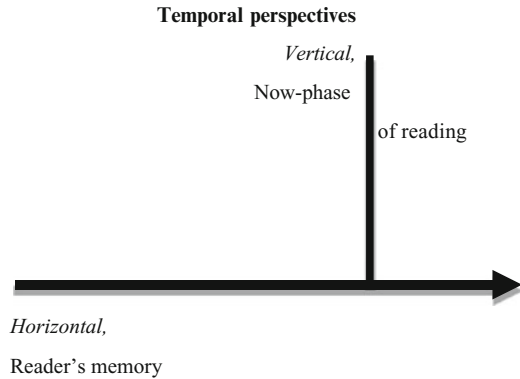
This state of affairs, we will see below, has certain consequences for our discussion, and at times we will have to correct, or try to correct, the effects of metonymic displacement; but we must first take that displacement for granted, since it forms part of the narrative game, and therefore accept literally the quasi-fiction of *Erzählzeit*, this false time standing in for a true time and to be treated—with the combination of reservation and acquiescence that this involves—as a *pseudo-time*. (Genette 1983, p. 34).

Genette, like Ingarden, contrasts the nontemporality of the literary work of art in itself with the temporality it gains from the act of reading. But accepting the fiction of discourse time as the time of *telling* the story emphasizes the cognitive relation to the representation, whereas focusing on discourse time as the time of *reading* emphasized the phenomenology of presentation. Instead of investigating the fictive narrator, I am *here* investigating the real reader. I will soon show how certain aesthetical features, which the phenomenological analysis can point out, escape Genette's analysis, but first let me return to the introduction to temporal perspectives in reading.

When reading literature, the temporal perspectives manifest themselves on two planes: *horizontally* during the reading process (in the reader's memory) and *vertically* in the individual phase of the reading process (temporal perspective actualized). So the different types of localization take place also within the reading of the literary work in question—the different represented events must be localized within the reader's memory of the past phases of the literary work (Fig. 1).

These two temporal perspectives cross each other during the reading; and the crossing at any given point is an important locus for the aesthetic experience, i.e., when our present temporal perspective coincides with the actualized temporal perspective. Hence, here I will only be talking about the vertical perspective, i.e., the literary representation of events with corresponding temporal perspectives. At any time during the reading, past events of the literary work can be recollected, but

Fig. 1 The two planes of temporal perspective



if we transport ourselves back to the past events of the work by leaving our present point of view, we are, strictly speaking, no longer performing an act of reading but an act of remembering. The aesthetic experience is prompted by the reading and, hence, actualization of the given part of the work and is as such tied to the present. Yet, given the sequential structure of literary artworks, memory is necessary for the reading of both the whole and the different parts. Ingarden points to existence of what he calls active memory—a type of memory that goes beyond the retention of the immediate past moments within the given temporal perspective.

Like in memory, there are two main types of temporal perspectives in literature, a distal and a proximal, on a graded continuum. As an example of a *distal* temporal perspective belonging to a represented event, Ingarden quotes from the beginning of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (2000).

On the lower deck in the babel of two hundred voices he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of a shell-fish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept the hearts of despairing men—always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book. (Conrad 2000, p. 3)

Here, the represented events are not located; the first sentence dislocates Jim's fantasy from his surroundings (cf. he would forget himself). But instead of focusing on the marks of internal focalization or the mood, Ingarden is only interested in the temporal presentation. How the distal perspective is elicited:

[The] distance is a result of the sketchiness of the portrayal and of the constant use of the iterative in the narration. We are always given almost simultaneously a multiplicity of similar facts, which take place at different moments. Thus we cannot grasp any truly unique event in itself. As readers, we must place ourselves in a sense outside the concrete, unidirectional flow of events and cannot place ourselves mentally in any given moment, in order from there to move along with the stream of events and regard them from close up. (Ingarden 1979, p. 128)

Importantly, Ingarden here notes that the structure of events is specified linguistically by the use of *grammatical aspect*. Ordinarily, the grammatical category of *tense* concerns the temporal location in relation to other events, whereas the category of aspect concerns the internal temporal structure of an event. But because, as shown with the categories before, the structure of an event (e.g., a successive structure) determines its phenomenological temporal localization relative to perspective, grammatical *aspect* is related to the localization of events in *discourse* time—grammatical *tense* to location in *story* time. When events are cast in the iterative aspect, they are not localized in at a specific time. Localizing an event reduces the temporal distance:

It was the dusk of a winter's day. The gale had freshened since noon, stopping the traffic on the river and now blew with the strength of a hurricane in fitful bursts that boomed like salvos of great guns firing over the ocean. The rain slanted in sheets that flicked and subsided, and between whiles Jim had threatening glimpses of the tumbling tide, the small craft jumbled and tossed along the shore, the motionless buildings in the driving mist, the broad ferry-boats pitching ponderously at anchor, the vast landing-stages heaving up and down and smothered in sprays. (Conrad 2000, p. 4)

Here, the events are localized, yet the events are summed up; many smaller events are portrayed in one. Following Ingarden's categories, the temporal perspective is, thus, closer but still fairly distal. For the temporal perspective to become more proximal, the events must be portrayed in their successive unfolding:

Jim felt his shoulder gripped firmly. 'Too late youngster.' The captain of the ship laid a restraining hand on that boy who seemed on the point of leaping overboard, and Jim looked up with the pain of conscious defeat in his eyes. The captain smiled sympathetically. 'Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart.' (Ibid., p. 5)

Here we have a proximal temporal perspective, due to both the successive description and the punctual aspect. Dialogue here enhances proximity. The proximal perspective corresponds to a scenic presentation, as Ingarden says:

Suddenly the temporal distance changes radically. A 'scene' is described in its different phases at very close temporal proximity. From a certain moment on we must in a sense become part of the course of events and move forward with them by observing them one after the other. (Ingarden 1979, p. 129)

The temporal point of view is dislocated and moves along with the progressive event—the temporal perspective is proximal and the event is dynamic. The scene is portrayed at such a small temporal distance that we almost "become eyewitnesses to what is 'just' happening" (ibid., p. 130). Herein lies, I believe, the answer to the question of how literature can make us feel as if we are witnessing the events portrayed; it is all a matter of *temporal presence*: our actual temporal perspective on the represented events becomes more proximal, i.e. more proximal to our present now. Given that temporal perspective indeed changes, as described by Ingarden, this is a real effect.

Often the more important events will be told from a proximal temporal perspective and the less important things will be told from a more distal perspective, i.e.,

background information: thereby the phenomena of temporal perspective become part of a text's semiotic structure—and all sense-making tools can be played with to create different effects. But to Ingarden, and my present investigation, it is more important what the changes in temporal perspective do to the *presentation* of the literary work of art during reading. The interchanging in the course of a literary work of art of the different temporal perspectives creates, according to Ingarden, a *foreground-background structure*:

Only then does the portrayed world acquire plasticity and *a certain three-dimensionality* as a result of the intermittent emergence into the *foreground* and recession into the *background* of various events. (Ibid., p. 128, my italics)

The changing temporal perspectives can literally give the experience of literary artworks a *temporal depth*. With a proximal temporal perspective, the represented events come to the foreground, and with a distal temporal perspective the represented events retire into the background. If Ingarden is correct about temporal perspectives creating a foreground-background structure in time, it seems it must be the temporal perspectives rather than, for instance, the spatial aspects that yield the perception-like experience of literary artworks. Here, I say 'perception-like.' I will make the claim even stronger in saying: *if* temporal perspectives create a foreground-background structure, it means that we can *temporally perceive* literary artworks. Instead of figures appearing in a dimensionless murky space, they appear in temporal dimensions—to the *linearity* of time, temporal perspective contributes not only *width* but also *depth*.

Perception is minimally defined as a figure-ground organization: a figure stands out in relation to a background. A figure is not the same as foreground. A figure is 'foregrounded' in relation to a background, yet the foreground in, for example, a painting is not in itself a figure. The closest proximal perspective occurs in combination with a dynamic event, which is *unbounded*. A figure is something *bounded* that stands out on a background. If the distance between the point of view and the event is too small, no figure stands out—like looking at a Monet too close up. When events are portrayed as dynamic, the point of view is inseparable from the event—it moves along with it. Only when events are experienced from a *located* point of view can the figure be anchored. The temporal point of view can be considered a *ground* and the event can be considered a *figure*; hence, this temporal figure-ground structure exists *only in reading*. The change in temporal perspective can change the figure-ground organization of events and hence our *perception* of events.

In linguistics, temporal aspects have also been thought to create a foreground-background structure in discourse (Joos 1964; Weinrich 1964/1973; Hopper 1979; Fleischman 1990/2011), but there the foreground is defined as a figure, and, hence, elicited by the perfect (bounded) aspect as opposed to the imperfect (unbounded) aspect (Fleischmann 1990, p. 24). That is the difference between the concept of figure-ground in linguistics and foreground-background in the phenomenology of Ingarden. In Ingarden, unboundedness creates more proximity; the figure is an intermediary state between foreground and background.

In cognitive linguistics, Leonard Talmy (2000) has investigated figure-ground structures in language, albeit in spatial terms and not in connection with temporal aspect. He has, though, investigated the effect of boundedness and unboundedness on (spatial) perspective. According to Talmy's general thesis, grammatical elements structure lexical elements, and they can reconceptualize lexical elements by introducing a shift in their content. He has an example of a (lexically) bounded event being (grammatically) unbounded. The bounded event is to *climb a ladder* (Talmy 2000, p. 61). It can be restructured as an unbounded event by saying, "She kept climbing higher and higher up the fire ladder" (*ibid.*, p. 62).

Here a cognitive operation of **magnification**, or **adoption of a proximal perspective**, would seem to have taken place. By this operation, a perspective point is established from which the existence of any exterior bounds falls outside of view or attention. (*Ibid.*, p. 62)

According to Talmy, unboundedness creates proximity—whereas making an event punctual, i.e., through reduction (e.g., she climbed the ladder *at exactly midday*), creates a distal spatial perspective. So just like in Ingarden, there is a relation between unboundedness and proximity. Talmy's category of 'state of boundedness' includes: point, boundedness, and unboundedness, which correspond to static localized 'one,' static localized 'many-in-one,' and dynamic localized 'one-by-one,' respectively—but his is defined as a *spatial* category which alters the *spatial* perspective. Besides, his description cannot account for the effect of the unboundedness in the first example from Conrad ("He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line"), which, according to Ingarden, creates a distal perspective.⁷ Talmy does not consider the temporal unbounding of an event because he only studies spatial boundedness. For example, 'She *always* climbed the ladder at exactly midday' enhances the *temporal distance* to the event and makes the temporal perspective more distal. This is a different operation in that it concerns temporal boundedness, not spatial boundedness. Apart from the correspondence between spatial organization in perception and language, my hypothesis is that when we concretize a literary work in acts of reading, we can *actually temporally perceive* the represented events.

In narratology, Genette has three categories relating to the temporal relation between story time and discourse time (cf. defined according to the 'fiction' of *Erzählzeit*): order, duration, and frequency. Order concerns tense; the latter two concern aspect and are more similar to Ingarden's temporal perspective. Duration concerns speed and thus the relation between summing-up (many-in-one) and succession (one-by-one). Frequency concerns the relation between punctual events

⁷This is due to the iterative. Talmy (2000) refers the iterative to a completely different operation called 'pattern of distribution,' where the iterative is defined as having a "multiplex" pattern of distribution, which is unrelated to perspective (p. 63f). Traditional grammatical aspect is explained by his two *spatial* categories of boundedness and distribution.

(one) and iterative events (one-in-many). But Genette only focuses on the *logic* of narratives and, thus, disregards the effect on the reader's (temporal) perspective, which means that incongruent temporal relations between story and discourse are considered as merely logical inconsistencies. Given my hypothesis of temporal perception, logical inconsistencies can be described as having an aesthetic effect in the presentation—similar to how 'logical inconsistencies' in paintings (when there is no clear distinction between foreground and background) can have aesthetic effects. One such inconsistency is what he calls the *pseudo-iterative*. As a test case for the relevance of my hypothesis.

5 Temporal Conflict in the Reading Experience: The Example of the Pseudo-Iterative

Genette mainly uses examples from Marcel Proust. But one thing he cannot account for with his narratological system is Proust's use of the iterative aspect. Iterativity belongs to Genette's category of 'frequency.' There are four possible types of frequency relations

1. *Narrating once what happened once*
2. *Narrating n times what happened n times*
3. *Narrating n times what happened once*
4. *Narrating one time (at one time) what happened n times*

The iterative corresponds to No. 4, an example could be: 'For a long time, I went to bed early,' which sums up many repetitive occurrences in one. The iterative is not to be understood as a singular event representing similar events by way of example, but as several similar events summed up into one, i.e., a general description. In classical narratives, Genette says:

Iterative sections are almost always functionally subordinate to singulative scenes, for which the iterative sections provide a sort of informative frame or *background* (Genette 1983, p. 116f, my italics)

Genette's use of the term 'background' is here to be understood in an informational sense—that the iterative functions as a sort of description. Nonetheless, the equivalence between phenomenological background and semiotic background is, while not surprising, worth noticing. But along came Modernism, e.g., Flaubert. In French, the imperfect tense is, among other things, used for repeated action, and Marcel Proust especially admired Flaubert's use of *imparfait*, what Proust calls Flaubert's "éternel imparfait" (Proust 1920, p. 8). The *éternel imparfait* not only renders the speech of his characters (often in free indirect discourse), but their whole life (ibid.). What touches Proust the most about Flaubert's style is that it gives a *masterful impression of time* (ibid., p. 17). Proust finds in Flaubert a solution to his own 'modest attempts' (*j'y retrouve l'aboutissement des modestes recherches que j'ai faites*). The new aspect on things and bodies is literally a new *temporal* aspect,

which creates a (temporal) distance to the objects portrayed.⁸ Proust himself uses the iterative aspect even more extensively and rigorously. Proust narrates what *used to happen*, regularly and ritually. According to Genette, Proust is intoxicated with the iterative (Genette 1983, p. 123). Proust, like Flaubert, uses the iterative in a way that “liberates the iterative from its functional dependence,” it no longer serves as an informative background; instead, the iterative passages take on “a wholly unusual fullness and autonomy” (ibid., p. 117). Proust’s portrayal of scenes is marked by a special *pseudo-iterative* aspect:

the very characteristic presence of what I will call the *pseudo-iterative*—that is, scenes presented, particularly by their wording in the imperfect, as iterative, whereas their richness and precision of detail ensure that no reader can seriously believe they occur and reoccur in that manner, several times, without any variation. (Ibid., p. 121)

The aspect is iterative, but the content of the scenes, the detailedness, makes it implausible that they reoccur exactly like that; it is logically inconsistent that any real repeated occurrence would have no variation, hence Genette calls it a pseudo-iterative.⁹ Genette’s definition is based on the logic, or lack thereof, of the represented world, the story. In view of the representation, the insistence on the *identical* re-occurrence becomes almost comical—like when we are told after a long monologue in Cervantes’ “The Jealous Extremaduran” that it was spoken “not once but a hundred times” (ibid., p. 122). But in view of the presentation, the use of the pseudo-iterative has a very interesting aesthetic effect. And since

⁸Let us have Proust express it with images: “[...] donc cet imparfait, si nouveau dans la littérature, change entièrement l’aspect des choses et des êtres, come font une lampe qu’on a déplacée, l’arrivée dans une maison nouvelle, l’ancienne si elle est presque vide et qu’on est en plein déménagement.” (Proust 1920, p. 8) Flaubert’s new use of the *imparfait* entirely changes the aspect of things and beings, like a lamp that has been replaced, arriving at a new home or being in the middle of moving out of the old. Familiar things suddenly seem strange; they are *defamiliarized*.

⁹An example would be the long conversation between Aunt Léonie and Françoise *every* Sunday at Combray, here is an extract:

- Francoise, imaginez-vous que Mme Goupil est passée plus d’un quart d’heure en retard pour aller chercher sa soeur; pour peu qu’elle s’attarde sur son chemin cela ne me surprendrait point qu’elle arrive apres l’élévation.
- Hé il n’y aurait rien d’étonnant, répondait Francoise.
- Francoise, vous seriez venue cinq minutes plus tot, vous auriez vu passer Mme Imbert qui tenait des asperges deux fois grosses comme celles de la mere Callot . . .
- Il n’y aurait rien d’étonnant qu’elles viennent de chez M. le Cure, disait Francoise.
- Ah! je vous crois bien, ma pauvre Francoise, répondait ma tante en haussant les epaules.

(Quoted from Houston 1962, p. 39). Houston was the first to point out the existence of the pseudo-iterative—or rather, the strange temporal patterns in Proust.

the pseudo-iterative aspect was first used by Flaubert that is where I will turn to find some interesting literary examples of the pseudo-iterative, or what I will call, instead, examples of temporal conflict.

5.1 *Flaubert's Éternel Imparfait*

Prominent examples of the pseudo-iterative in Flaubert are, according to Genette, the narration of Emma's life in the convent, her life at Tostes before and after the ball, and her Thursdays at Rouen with Léon (I: ch. 6, 7, 9; III: ch. 5). Here is how her Thursday meetings with her lover Léon are described:

C'était le jeudi. Elle se levait, et elle s'habillait silencieusement pour ne point réveiller Charles [...] Par peur d'être vue, elle ne prenait pas ordinairement le chemin le plus court. Elle s'engouffrait dans les ruelles sombres, et elle arrivait tout en sueur vers le bas de la rue Nationale, près de la fontaine qui est là. C'est le quartier du théâtre, des estaminets et des filles. Souvent une charrette passait près d'elle, portant quelque décor qui tremblait. Des garçons en tablier versaient du sable sur les dalles, entre des arbustes verts. On sentait l'absinthe, le cigare et les huîtres. Elle tournait une rue; elle le reconnaissait à sa chevelure frisée qui s'échappait de son chapeau. Léon, sur le trottoir, continuait à marcher. Elle le suivait jusqu'à l'hôtel; il montait, il ouvrait la porte, il entrait... Quelle étreinte!

(Flaubert 2011: Loc 4819 of 6588) [She went on Thursdays. She got up and dressed silently, in order not to awaken Charles [...] For fear of being seen, she did not usually take the most direct road. She plunged into dark alleys, and, all perspiring, reached the bottom of the Rue Nationale, near the fountain that stands there. It is the quarter for theatres, public-houses, and whores. Often a cart would pass near her, bearing some shaking scenery. Waiters in aprons were sprinkling sand on the flagstones between green shrubs. It all smelt of absinthe, cigars, and oysters. She turned down a street; she recognized him by his curling hair that escaped from beneath his hat. Léon walked along the pavement. She followed him to the hotel. He went up, opened the door, entered... What an embrace!]

Despite the iterative, specified by the use of imparfait, the meticulous description of every part of her tour with a wealth of details, like the specific sights and smells, makes the description tend toward the foreground, especially the last sentence, where all of the subparts of going up to the hotel room are described, yet still in the iterative: “il *montait*, il *ouvrait* la porte, il *entrait*... Quelle étreinte!” (go up, open door, enter). The event is both iterative (one-in-many) and dynamic (one-by-one). The iterative temporally unbounds the events, which creates a distal perspective. But the detailed description of all the dependent parts makes the event dynamic and thereby temporally unbounds the point of view—which creates a proximal perspective. There are actually two possibilities for creating a simultaneous foreground-background structure: by bounding both event and point of view (summing-up or punctual) or *by unbounding both event and point of view*. The pseudo-iterative, which seems somewhat logically inconsistent in terms of the representation (the story), makes the presentation stand out more clearly—the *distance* to the represented event is enhanced, we are not just immersed in the dynamic action.

This type of description continues almost throughout the chapter (i.e., for many pages). Here is how they spend their time in the hotel room:

Comme ils aimaient cette bonne chambre pleine de gaieté, malgré sa splendeur un peu fanée! Ils retrouvaient toujours les meubles à leur place, et parfois des épingles à cheveux qu'elle avait oubliées, l'autre jeudi, sous le socle de la pendule. Ils déjeunaient au coin du feu, sur un petit guéridon incrusté de palissandre. Emma découpait, lui mettait les morceaux dans son assiette en débitant toutes sortes de chattering; et elle riait d'un rire sonore et libertin quand la mousse du vin de Champagne débordait du verre léger sur les bagues de ses doigts. Ils étaient si complètement perdus en la possession d'eux-mêmes, qu'ils se croyaient là dans leur maison particulière, et devant y vivre jusqu'à la mort, comme deux éternels jeunes époux. Ils disaient notre chambre, notre tapis, nos fauteuils, même elle disait mes pantouffles, un cadeau de Léon, une fantaisie qu'elle avait eue. C'étaient des pantouffles en satin rose, bordées de cygne. Quand elle s'asseyait sur ses genoux, sa jambe, alors trop courte, pendait en l'air; et la mignarde chaussure, qui n'avait pas de quartier, tenait seulement par les orteils à son pied nu.

(Flaubert 2011: 4877 of 6588) [How they loved that dear room, so full of gaiety, despite its rather faded splendor! They always found the furniture in the same place, and sometimes hairpins, that she had forgotten the Thursday before, under the pedestal of the clock. They lunched by the fireside on a little round table, inlaid with rosewood. Emma carved, put bits on his plate with all sorts of coquettish ways, and she laughed with a sonorous and libertine laugh when the froth of the champagne ran over from the glass to the rings on her fingers. They were so completely lost in the possession of each other that they thought themselves in their own house, and that they would live there till death, like two spouses eternally young. They said 'our room,' 'our carpet,' she even said 'my slippers,' a gift of Leon's, a whim she had had. They were pink satin, bordered with swansdown. When she sat on his knees, her leg, then too short, hung in the air, and the dainty shoe, that had no back to it, was held only by the toes to her bare foot.]

In this scene, the iterative almost makes the dynamic events static. They play together like “two spouses eternally young,” the room becomes a state; Flaubert's *éternel imparfait* becomes very literal here. Yet, the distance created by the iterative is not simply, like so often in Proust, an aesthetic distance—it also augments the Flaubertian irony. Emma's coquettish ways, the little game of ‘our room’ and ‘our carpet,’ the dream of living there till death: all are easily recognizable clichés. The distal temporal perspective prevents the reader from becoming completely absorbed in their doings. It creates an ironic distance—similar to the ironic distance in the famous bed scene (cf. part one), where Charles is gazing at Emma's eyes—eternally at a distance.

In the next chapter, however, things change. One Thursday, as Léon is on his way to meet Emma, he is held up by the apothecary Homais. Emma waits in vain for him at the hotel. She is devastated by his absence. At a late hour, Léon manages to escape from Homais and runs up and explains the situation to Emma. She is first passionately angry, then offended, and then tears fill her eyes. Léon promises to come back “immediately” after he has said goodbye to Homais, waiting downstairs (ignorant of the situation upstairs). But, alas, Léon does not manage to escape from the apothecary—when he finally returns to the room, Emma is gone. They have missed a Thursday. The iterative pattern is broken. But as they resume their meeting, the iterative is also resumed—yet a radical change has happened:

Ils en vinrent à parler plus souvent de choses indifférentes à leur amour; et dans les lettres qu'Emma lui envoyait, il était question de fleurs, de vers, de la lune et des étoiles, ressources naïves d'une passion affaiblie, qui essayait de s'aviver à tous les secours extérieurs. Elle se promettait continuellement, pour son prochain voyage, une félicité profonde; puis elle s'avouait ne rien sentir d'extraordinaire. Cette déception s'effaçait vite sous un espoir nouveau, et Emma revenait à lui plus enflammée, plus avide. *Elle se déshabillait brutalement, arrachant le lacet mince de son corset qui sifflait autour de ses hanches comme une couleuvre qui glisse. Elle allait sur la pointe de ses pieds nus regarder encore une fois si la porte était fermée, puis elle faisait d'un seul geste tomber ensemble tous ses vêtements; et pâle, sans parler, sérieuse, elle s'abattait contre sa poitrine, avec un long frisson.*

Cependant il y avait sur ce front couvert de gouttes froides, sur ces lèvres balbutiantes, dans ces prunelles égarées, dans l'étreinte de ces bras, quelque chose d'extrême, de vague et de lugubre, qui semblait à Léon se glisser entre eux subtilement, comme pour les séparer. (my emphasis)

(Flaubert 2011: 5228 of 6588) [They gradually came to talking more frequently of matters outside their love, and in the letters that Emma wrote him she spoke of flowers, verses, the moon and the stars, naïve resources of a waning passion striving to keep itself alive by all external aids. She was constantly promising herself a profound happiness on her next trip; then she confessed to herself that she felt nothing extraordinary. This disappointment quickly gave way to a new hope, and Emma returned to him more inflamed, more avid. *She undressed brutally, tearing off the thin laces of her corset that they would whistle round her hips like a gliding snake. She went on tiptoe, barefooted, to see once more that the door was closed, then with one movement, she would let all her clothes fall at once; and pale, without speaking, serious, she would throw herself against his breast with a long shudder.*

Yet there was upon that brow covered with cold drops, on those quivering lips, in those wild eyes, in the strain of those arms, something vague and dreary that seemed to Leon to glide between them subtly as if to separate them.] (my emphasis)

I have emphasized the strip scene because it is dense with action: the parts of the action are described one-by-one; the action verbs naturally correspond to the successive structure, like Lessing would have it; and the fictive motion of the thin laces whistling (*sifflait*) round her hips like a snake, the telic lexical aspect of undressing (*se déshabillait*).¹⁰ Even if part of a striptease is prolonging the end, the specification “brutally” removes the teasing—the adverbial markers of punctual aspect like “one movement” and “at once” enhance the dynamics of the event. From a logical point of view, if she strips like this every time they are together—brutally tearing off the thin laces of the corset—she must be spending a lot of money on buying new corsets. In other words, the precise re-occurrence of this event seems implausible.

From a phenomenological perspective, on the other hand, the temporal point of view is here unbounded and moves along with the depicted events. It creates a proximal temporal perspective. But the constant use of the iterative temporally unbounds the event, creating a distance. The *temporal conflict* between the represented events and the present perspective is enhanced, but because both event and point of view are temporally unbounded, the perspective is very unstable—even more so

¹⁰I am grateful to Peer Bundgaard for pointing this out to me.

than when a foreground-background structures is established by boundedness. The configuration is *rare* as it regards memory—if we cannot locate an event, we cannot go back in time and move along with its dependent parts. We must first grasp the events as bounded, independent wholes. But here, the figure-ground structure is created through unboundedness, which is especially salient in this example, where the dynamics of the events threaten the discontinuous organization. The eternal striptease elicits a *non-generic* temporal perspective (in the sense of, e.g., Jean Petitot 2004). It is difficult to stay with this unstable presentation because of the non-genericity of the temporal perspective: the result is a temporal conflict in the reading experience.

The dynamic proximity makes the schematized aspects appear very clearly and vividly—it is hard to refrain from filling-out. But only by staying with the concretized *presentation* can the “something vague and dreary” that seems “to glide between them subtly as if to separate them” be *perceived*. The aesthetic distance crucially depends upon the filling-out being held back—because, as Julian Barnes has said of the Flaubertian aesthetics: *who needs to burst into fulfillment’s desolate attic?*

5.2 Kafka’s *Eternal Present*

So far, it might seem as if the pseudo-iterative is something particular to the French language, where the iterative aspect is marked by the imperfect tense. Therefore, I will give a comparable example from German. The examples are from one of Franz Kafka’s last unfinished short stories “The Burrow” (*Der Bau*). The text has been the object of much discussion due to its deviant use of aspect (e.g., Henel 1972; Cohn 1978; Coetzee 1981). The story is written in first-person present tense. In German, temporal aspect is not specified morphologically but only through the use of adverbs. The present tense oscillates between the general and the particular, i.e., between generic present and progressive present. It is not stabilized as the *imparfait*, but the aspectual ambiguity of the present tense makes it suitable for temporal experimentation. Kafka has often experimented with the present tense, e.g., in “The Country Doctor,” which has led to the title of Dorrit Cohn’s famous essay “Kafka’s Eternal Present” (1968). In connection to “The Burrow,” Cohn quotes from one of Kafka’s aphorisms: “The decisive moment of human development is everlasting” (Cohn 1978, p. 197). J. M. Coetzee (1981) cites the same aphorism, and describes the awareness of time presented therein as eschatological, not historical; it recognizes no continuity:

There is only the present, which is always present, separated from Ingarden’s ‘dead past’ by a moment of rupture, the *entscheidende Augenblick*. Hence the paradox that history is over in ‘a second’ while the present moment is ‘everlasting.’ (p. 578)

How Kafka depicts the eternal present in “The Burrow” Cohn and Coetzee disagree upon. The discussion revolves around whether or not there occurs a change in temporal aspect midway through the narrative.

An undefined mole-like creature at work constructing a huge labyrinthine burrow tells the story. The narrative moves continuously along, but midway through, there is a gap in narrative time (discourse): “I must have slept for a long time,” it says. When the creature awakens, there is a change: a whistling sound can be heard. The sound is low at first, but, at least in the creature’s consciousness, it becomes louder. The creature is convinced it is some enemy coming for him—another creature in a rivaling burrow, trying to dig his way through. The creature’s paranoia more and more consumes him as he tries to take precaution against the unknown enemy (i.e., the whistling sound) by endlessly reconstructing the burrow. The story ends unresolved midsentence. According to Cohn, the first part before the whistling sound is narrated in a durative-iterative present, while the part after the arrival of the sound is in a punctual present. Coetzee disagrees, and I side with Coetzee. Here is an example from after the sound—the creature is working at moving his provisions to the inner circles:

Die erste Arbeit ist sehr mühselig und nimmt mich ganz in Anspruch: die Beute nämlich durch die engen und schwachwandigen Gänge des Labyrinths zu bringen. Ich drücke vorwärts mit allen Kräften und es geht auch, aber mir viel zu langsam; um es zu beschleunigen, reiße ich einen Teil der Fleischmassen zurück und dränge mich über sie hinweg, durch sie hindurch, nun habe ich bloß einen Teil vor mir, nun ist es leichter, ihn vorwärts zu bringen, *aber ich bin derart mitten darin in der Fülle des Fleisches hier in den engen Gängen, durch die es mir, selbst wenn ich allein bin, nicht immer leicht wird durchzukommen, daß ich recht gut in meinen eigenen Vorräten ersticken könnte, manchmal kann ich mich schon nur durch Fressen und Trinken vor ihrem Andrang bewahren.*

[The first part of the work is very laborious and requires all my energy: that is, bringing my catch through the labyrinth’s narrow passages with their thin walls. I push forward with all my might, and this works, but much too slowly for me; to speed things up, I tear back a piece of this mass of meat and push my way over the top, right through it, now I have only some of it in front of me, now it is easier to advance, *but I am so deep in the midst of this profusion of meat here, in these narrow passages, through which it is not always easy to pass even by myself, that I could easily suffocate in my own provisions, there are times when I can save myself from the crush of plenty only by feeding and drinking.*] (p. 176, my emphasis)

At first, it seems like a punctual present, but I have emphasized when a change begins to happen. As the creature is caught in the midst of the meat, an iterative aspect begins to take over. The event is clearly temporally unbounded in the final sentence, through the “manchmal” (there are times, often), yet the telic actions of feeding and drinking, which the fear of suffocation implies are performed in a rather desperate fashion, pulls the description back towards the punctual. Since the aspect is not clearly marked in German, the presentation oscillates rapidly between a proximal and a distal perspective. Caught in the midst of the profusion of meat in a narrow underground passage, trying to avoid suffocation by repeatedly eating and drinking a way through—at least that presents a good image of a state of eternal desperation.

But in some of the passages from before the sound, a punctual aspect breaks into the iterative passages. The creature is, as always in the story, restructuring

the burrow; here it is that his sleeping quarters are moved toward the inner circles (where, at this particular point in the story, his provisions are also located):

Dann pflegen besonders friedliche Zeiten zu kommen, in denen ich meine Schlafplätze langsam, allmählich von den äußeren Kreisen nach innen verlege, immer tiefer in die Gerüche tauche, *bis ich es nicht mehr ertrage und eines Nachts auf den Burgplatz stürze, mächtig unter den Vorräten aufräume und bis zur vollständigen Selbstbetäubung mit dem Besten, was ich liebe, mich fülle*. Glückliche, aber gefährliche Zeiten; wer sie auszunützen verstünde, könnte mich leicht, ohne sich zu gefährden, vernichten.

[Then, especially peaceful times tend to follow, when I slowly and gradually shift my sleeping quarters from the outer circles toward the inner, diving ever more deeply into the smells, *until I can't stand it any longer and on a given night, storm into the castle court and wreck havoc among the provisions, gorging myself to the point of total torpor on the greatest delicacies I have*. Happy but perilous times; anyone who knew how to take advantage of them could easily annihilate me at no danger to himself.] (p. 167, my emphasis)

I have emphasized the punctual ‘interruption’ of the iterative present. Again, it is the telicity of the ‘storming into,’ ‘wrecking havoc,’ ‘gorging to the point of total torpor,’ that elicits the punctual, but the framing of the event as first ‘peaceful times,’ then ‘happy but perilous times’ marks the event as iterative, reoccurring within a given period of time. In contrast to the French examples, the shifting aspects do not create a structured foreground—background; rather, the temporal perspective is constantly oscillating between foreground and background. The temporal location of both events and point of view is ever-changingly unbounded, and the reader is lost in the labyrinth. Where the example from Flaubert created a non-generic temporal perspective, the examples from Kafka create a bi-stable temporal perspective. If Flaubert (and Proust) elicits a perspective comparable to the perfect symmetry of this view on the Necker cube—which is very non-generic in memory—Kafka’s text, instead, elicits a temporal perspective comparable to the bi-stable Necker cube (Fig. 2).

The square is ambiguous. Either it is seen ‘from above’ (focus on the base of the cube) or ‘from below’ (focus on the left side of the cube). In Kafka’s text,

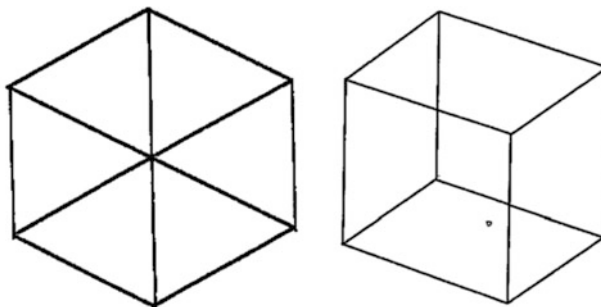


Fig. 2 The non-generic, symmetrical Necker cube (left); the bi-stable Necker cube (right)

the temporal perspective is similarly ambiguous. There is a constant (or at least a potential constant) shift in perspective. Thus, the everlasting decisive moment is *present* to the reader—as an eternal Kafkaesque catastrophe.

6 Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed the specificities of the presentation of *literary* artworks, which I argued were to be compared with acts of remembering—in that memory re-presents events in time that are no longer present in space. I also, rather gently, suggested that both reading and remembering depend on temporal perception, in that both processes entail the perception of a *temporal distance* to the re- or represented events. I thus discussed the phenomenon of temporal perspective—first in relation to memory, then in relation to literature. In literature, the reader’s temporal perspective creates a foreground-background structure, which gives a certain three-dimensionality to the experience of literary artworks. I briefly mentioned the similarities to and differences from linguistic and narrative theories of perspective and foreground-background (and figure-ground). I then went on to discuss the phenomenon that Genette has dubbed the pseudo-iterative. I wanted to show how the idea of the reader’s temporal perspective could better account for the phenomenological and, hence, also aesthetic effects of the pseudo-iterative—something Genette’s logical handling of the phenomenon could not. I argued that in Flaubert’s case (especially in the last example), the pseudo-iterative elicited a non-generic perspective; in Kafka’s case, a bi-stable perspective. In both cases, these perspectives enhanced the temporal conflict between presentation and representation in reading.

By way of conclusion on my analysis of the pseudo-iterative in terms of temporal perspective, I will venture the claim that, like spatial perspective in pictorial art was discovered in the Renaissance, perhaps temporal perspective in literature was ‘discovered’ in Modernism. And like spatial perspective was played with for interesting effects (e.g., Piero della Francesca and Nicolas Poussin, cf. Petitot 2009), so can temporal perspective be played with for presentational effects.

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